

REMARKS

The specification has been amended to overcome the informalities noted by the Examiner in the last Office Action with the exception of those referred to on page 12, the “centering formations” referred to on page 12, lines 11 and 12, are in fact the elements 114a and 114b. The “respective complementary formations” are not the elements 114a and 114b as suggested by the Examiner but the counter part (not labeled in the figures) projecting from the upper rim of the container C and respectively the cavity 115 in the frame 103 as described on pages 7 and 8 of the specification.

In the last Office Action claims 7 and 9 were objected to because of informalities and claims 1-16 inclusive were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph as being indefinite. Claims 1-5, 10 and 11 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by Rikker. Claims 1-5, 10 and 11 were further rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by Travillian. Claims 1, 5, 10 and 11 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Shebuski in view of Yoshida. Claims 6-9 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over either Rikker or Travillian in view of VanRens et al. Claims 12-16 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over either Rikker or Travillian in view of McMellon.

Claims 1-16 inclusive have been cancelled without prejudice in order to advance the prosecution of the present application and new claims 17-28 inclusive have been substituted therefore. Reconsideration and allowance of the application are respectfully requested in view of the following remarks.

New independent claim 17 is a combination of original claims 1 and 6 and new claims 18-21 and 27 which are dependent from new claim 17 correspond to original dependent claims 7-10 and 15 respectively. New dependent claims 22-26 and 28 correspond to original depending claims 2, 11-14 and 16 respectively. The new claims have been drafted in a manner to overcome the objections and the rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112.

Since new independent claim 17 is a combination of original claims 1 and 6 it is submitted that claim 17 would not be obvious in view of the teachings of either Rikker or Travillian in view of VanRens et al. Claim 17 specifically sets forth that the positioning means 27 includes first gripping means 110, capable of acting on the models S and second gripping means 112 capable of acting on the container C so that when the first and second gripping means are gripping the model and the container respectively the model and the container will be substantially connected to each other as a single piece during the vibrational motion generated by the vibration means 32a. This characteristic is considered to be the essence of the present invention since it provides a solution to the technical problem of ensuring a rigid connection between the foam models and the containers while the containers are being vibrated so as to avoid any relative movement between the model and the containers thus preventing the risk of breakage. Since Rikker and Travillian fail to disclose the use of a second clamping or gripping element for the containers and attempt was made to rely upon the teachings of VanRens to provide such a feature. VanRens discloses the use of a second gripping element comprising a connecting member attached to the container 12 and received in a slot provided by a connecting arm 19. However such a gripping element is not mounted on the means for positioning the

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models and moreover it is only intended for transmitting a horizontal shaking force to the container in order to help the sand compact around the models. No suggestion is made about the need or the opportunity of connecting the models and the container as a single piece. Therefore there is no teaching or suggestion in VanRens which would lead one skilled in the art to even consider combining VanRens with Rikkers or Travillian since such a combination would still not meet the specific limitations of new claim 77. Accordingly it is submitted that claim 17 as well as claims 18-28 inclusive which are dependent either directly or indirectly therefrom are allowable. Accordingly it is not deemed necessary to argue the rejections as applied to the remaining original claims. Therefore it is respectfully requested that claim 17-28 inclusive be allowed and the application passed to issue forthwith.

If for any reason the Examiner is unable to allow the application on the next Office Action and feels that an interview would be helpful to resolve any remaining issue, the Examiner is respectfully requested to contact the undersigned attorney for the purpose of arranging such an interview.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert V. Sloan", written over a horizontal line.

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APPENDIX

VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE

IN THE SPECIFICATION:

The specification is changed as follows:

Page 1, delete the heading "DESCRIPTION" and insert the heading

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Page 1, the second paragraph should read as follows:

--The ~~L~~ost-foam casting technique represents an ever more widely employed foundry that is essentially based on the preparation of a model, generally made of polystyrene or some similar material, that exactly reproduces the characteristics of the piece to be cast. This model is inserted in a container (flask) filled with sand, which is then vibrated until the sand is distributed and compacted in such a manner as to adopt itself closely to and reproduce the exact shape of the model. Hot casting material (typically molten metal) is then poured into the space occupied by the model. The casting material dissolves the model and thus goes to occupy the space that was previously occupied by the model in the surrounding sand. The final result is therefore the obtainment of a casting, i.e. a workpiece, that exactly reproduces the shape of the model.--

Page 1, after the second paragraph insert the heading

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Page 1, the third paragraph ending at the top of page 3 should read as follows:

--The present invention comes to grips, first and foremost, with the problem of optimizing the operations that lead to the model being inserted or <<drowned>> in the sand prior to its compaction by vibration. This, in particular, as regards the need of avoiding such

phenomena as breakage or displacement of the model (typically realized in the form of a cluster of smaller individual models). Subordinately, the invention also sets out to realize a filling device of the intelligent type, capable - in particular - of identifying the individual model and/or the container into which it has been inserted and thus to render possible, for example, selective specialization of the various processing operations, this to the point of arriving at treating each model/casting in accordance with a particular tailor-made processing <<recipe>>.--

Page 2, after the second full paragraph insert the heading

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Page 3, before the first paragraph insert the heading

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Page 3, the fourth paragraph should read as follows:

--In particular, the substation 21 can be defined as a prefilling station: here a certain quality of sand F (as shown in Figure 2)originating from within the silo 20 is fed through a duct 25 and an associated hopper 26 into the bottom part of the container C that at any given moment happens to be in the substation 21.--

Page 4, the first paragraph should read as follows:

--The next substation, indicated by 22, has a somewhat more complex structure that will be described in greater detail ~~further on~~later. At the substation 22 the polystyrene models or outlines S (usually in the form of model clusters, as already noted) are arranged inside the containers that have already had a certain quantity of sand filled into their bottom parts at the substation 21. The models S are usually taken from a feeder turntable (not shown in the figure)

by means of a robot of which only the pick-up arm is shown by means of a ~~dotted~~dashed line in Figure 2, where it is identified by the letter R. The design and operating details of the robot in question (which could be of any known type, an anthropomorphic robot being a case in point) are not in themselves relevant for a proper understanding of the invention and will not therefore be described in any detail. Here it will be sufficient to recall the fact that the model S normally consists of a model cluster provided with a grip formation T by means of which it can be picked up by the arm R of the robot to be sustained centrally, i.e. in a position that substantially coincides with the barycentre, by a positioning element indicated by the reference number 27 and subsequently to be described in greater detail.--

Page 5, amend the first full paragraph as follows:

--The action of filling the container C with sand is completed a the subsequent substations indicated by 23 and 24. As far as complexity is concerned, these two substations may be said to be intermediate between the complexity of substation 21 and that of substation 22. The fact, the substations 23 and 24 include respective ducts 33 and 34 for feeding sand from the silo 20 into the hoppers 35 and 36. In this case, of course, there is no longer present the complex of parts and elements needed for arranging the models S inside the containers C. But what does have to be present at this stage are the lifting organs 31b and 31c and the vibration devices 32b and 32c, which are substantially similar to the devices 31a and 32a that have already been mentioned in connection with substation 22.--

Page 7, the fourth paragraph ending at the top of page 8 should read as follows:

--The said centering formation preferably include a fork element 114a, which - when the element 27 comes to be located (as will be described in greater detail ~~further on~~later) at the level of the upper rim of the container C - will engage with an appropriate counterpart projecting from that rim and will thus avoid undesired relative rotations. Usually there will also be present a pin 114b, as well as a corresponding cavity 115 carried in a generically peripheral position by the inner frame of the frame 103.--

Page 14, the first full paragraph should read as follows:

--These variables and the possible changed associated with them can therefore be configured as a typical <<recipe>> for each casting.--.

Page 15, the full paragraph should read as follows:

--Naturally, the realization details and the implementation forms can be widely varied with respect to what has hereby been described and illustrated without in any way altering the principle of the present invention or going beyond its scope as defined by the claims set out below.--

IN THE CLAIMS:

Claims 1-16 inclusive are canceled.

Claims 17-28 are added as new claims.

IN THE ABSTRACT:

The Abstract is changed as follows:

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

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The device, which can be used for filling containers in a lost-foam casting system, includes in a single operational combination:

———_supporting means for containers with associated vibration means to set the said containers into vibration;

———_sand-feeding means, such as a hopper, for feeding dosed quantities of sand into the said container; and

———_positioning means that make it possible to locate foam models into containers and sustaining them both while the sand is being fed into the containers and while the containers are being vibrated, thus avoiding the risks of malpositioning and/or breakage. Preferably, both the sand feeding hopper and model-positioning means on the same equipment capable of moving between a raised position in which the hopper may be loaded with the sand, while the foam models are being transferred to the positioning means, by means of a robot for example, and a lowered position, in which the models are inserted into the containers, after which the latter can be filled with sand.

(Figure 2)

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DESCRIPTION

Background OF The Invention

The present invention relates to devices for filling containers in lost-foam casting systems.

The lost-foam casting technique represents an ever more widely employed foundry technique that is essentially based on the preparation of a model, generally made of polystyrene or some similar material, that exactly reproduces the characteristics of the piece to be cast. This model is inserted in a container (flask) filled with sand, which is then vibrated until the sand is distributed and compacted in such a manner as to adapt itself closely to and reproduce the exact shape of the model. Hot casting material (typically molten metal) is then poured into the space occupied by the model. The casting material dissolves the model and thus ^{occupies} ~~goes~~ to occupy the space that was previously occupied by the model in the surrounding sand. The final result is therefore the obtainment of a casting, i.e. a workpiece, that exactly reproduces the shape of the model.

Summary of The Invention

The present invention comes to grips, first and foremost, with the problem of optimizing the operations that lead to the model being inserted or drowned in the sand prior to its compaction by vibration. ~~This~~ In particular, ^{the present invention avoids} as regards the need of avoiding such phenomena as breakage or displacement of the model (typically realized in the form of a cluster of smaller individual models). ^{Subordinately,} ~~Subordinately,~~ ^{additionally,} the invention also ^{provides} ~~sets out to realize~~ a filling device of the intelligent type, capable, & in particular, of identifying the individual model and/or the container into which it has been inserted and thus ^{making it} ~~to render~~ possible, for example, ^{to achieve} selective specialization of the various processing operations, this to the point of ~~arriving at~~ treating each model/casting in accordance with a particular tailor-made ^{process} ~~processing recipe~~.

According to the present invention, this scope is attained by means of a container-filling device for lost-foam casting systems, including in a single operational combination:

- supporting means for containers with associated vibration means to set the said containers into vibration;
- sand-feeding means capable of selectively feeding dosed quantities of sand into the said containers; and
- positioning means that can selectively be associated with the said containers to position foam models into the said containers; the said positioning means being capable of sustaining the said models both while the sand is being fed into the containers by the said feeding means and while the containers containing the said models are being vibrated by the said vibration means.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The invention will now be described, though purely by way of example and not to be considered limitative in any way, by reference to the attached drawings, where:

Figure 1 shows a general view in side elevation of a container-filling station in a lost-foam casting system;

Figure 2 shows a larger-scale view of the part of Figure 1 indicated by the arrow II;

Figure 3 shows another view in side elevation of the device shown in Figure 2, but this time seen in a direction that is substantially orthogonal with respect to the viewing direction of Figure 2;

Figure 4 is a simplified explanatory view based on Fig 2.
Detailed Description of the Invention

The general view of Figure 1 represents a station 2 for filling the containers of a lost-foam casting plant or system. The plant in question could consist, for example, of the system described in greater detail in a European patent application filed on the same date by the same applicants.

At the station 2 the models S are inserted into the containers C in which the casting operations are to be performed, the said containers being subsequently filled with sand and subjected to vibration, so that the sand will eventually become compacted and be in close contact with the outer surface of the said models S.

The movement of the containers C is realized from left to right, with respect to the viewing direction of Figure 1 in such a way ^{so} as to produce a step-by-step forward motion of the containers below a main silo 20 designed for feeding sand by means of free fall to four successive filling substations. The said filling substations are consecutively numbered from 21 to 24 in the direction in which the containers C move forward beneath the silo 20. For this purpose the containers C are usually placed on platform trolleys [[carriers]] 50 that move forward (under the action of movement control means not shown on the drawing) on rotating bodies 51 that could be, for example, rollers or wheels.

In particular, the substation 21 can be defined as a prefilling station [[here]] ^{since} a certain quantity of sand F (not shown in Figure 1) originating from within the silo 20 is fed through a duct 25 and an associated hopper 26 into the bottom part of the container C that at any given moment happens to be in the substation 21.

The next substation, indicated by 22, has a somewhat more complex structure that will be described in greater detail later. At the substation 22 the polystyrene models or outlines S (usually in the form of model clusters, as already noted) are arranged inside the containers that have already had a certain quantity of sand filled into their bottom parts at the substation 21. The models S are usually taken from a

feeder turntable (not shown in the figure) by means of a robot of which only the pick-up arm^R₁ is shown by means of a dashed line in Figure 2₁ where it is identified by the letter R. The design and operating details of the robot in question (which could be of any known type, an anthropomorphic robot being a case in point) are not in themselves relevant for a proper understanding of the invention and will not therefore be described in any detail. Here it will be sufficient to recall the fact that the model S normally consists of a model cluster provided with a grip formation T by means of which it can be picked up by the arm R of the robot to be sustained centrally, i.e. in a position that substantially coincides with the barycentre, by a positioning element indicated by the reference number 27 and subsequently [to be] described in greater detail.

At the substation 22 the container C receives, this time from the hopper 30, a further quantity of sand intended to cover the model S for a substantial part of its height.

At the said substation 22 the container C is also lifted slightly in a vertical direction to detach it from the conveyor structure 50, while the lifting organs 31a (see Figure 3) that perform the said lifting action are caused to vibrate by means of a vibration device 32a. In this way the sand inside the container C is subjected to the necessary vibration and compaction action. Both the pick-up (gripping) organs 31a and the vibration device 32a are well known [to] the state of ⁱⁿthe art and need not therefore [here] be described in further detail.

The action of filling the container C with sand is completed at the subsequent substations indicated by 23 and 24. As far as complexity is concerned, these two substations may be said to be intermediate between the complexity of substation 21

and that of substation 22. In fact, the substations 23 and 24 include respective ducts 33 and 34 for feeding sand from the silo 20 into the hoppers 35 and 36. In this case, of course, there is no longer present the complex of parts and elements needed for arranging the models S inside the containers C. But what does have to be present at this stage are the lifting organs 31b and 31c and the vibration devices 32b and 32c, which are substantially similar to the devices 31a and 32a that have already been ^{described} mentioned in connection with substation 22.

^{CARRYING OUT}
The choice of ~~realizing~~ the filling and the vibration of the containers C in successive phases is in keeping with the need for gradual immersion of the model S in the sand, thereby assuring that the sand around it will become fully compacted. This choice is also imposed by the general needs bound up with the timing of the forward movement of the containers C on the conveyor system and assuring the desired productivity levels.

^{shows} ⁱⁿ ^{greater detail} ^{the structure of the device that constitutes the substation 22.} Referring to the side elevation ^{shown} ~~show~~ in this figure, ^{one} notes the presence of ^{an} upright 100 ^{is in a} position that can be described as ^{generically} ~~being~~ by the side of the line along which the trolleys 50 bearing the containers C are moving forward.

Mounted on the said upright 100 in such a way as to enable it to move up and down under the action of an appropriate fluid jack 101 there is a mobile item of equipment 102 having the general structure of a projecting bracket. This bracket-like structure 102 sustains the hopper 30 below the bottom outlet opening 20a of the silo 20 and also ^{extends downwards in the} form of a cage structure 29 which ^{carries} ~~sustains~~ a frame 103 in

a position [that may be described as generically] below the hopper 30. In its turn, the said frame 103 ^{CARRIES} [sustains] the previously mentioned positioning element 27 in a generically central position.

The complex of parts just described, usually realized in the form of structural steelwork, is therefore capable of moving vertically along an axis X_c along which the following elements are arranged:

- the bottom outlet opening 20a of the silo 20,
- the hopper 30 with its discharge opening 104, complete with an appropriate opening and closing system 105 of a known type,
- the frame 103 with the positioning element 27 that, in its turn, sustains the model S in a central position, and
- the container C that at that particular moment occupies the substation 22.

The bracket-like structure 102 is [preferably realized] in the form of a square metal frame capable of carrying the hopper 30 through the intermediary of appropriate load cells 106 (which may be three in number, for example) on which [there] rest the correspondingly positioned bracket structures 107 projecting radially from the upper edge of the hopper 30. The load cells 106 therefore provide signals that indicate the quantity of sand present in the hopper 30 and, consequently, the quantity of sand that will eventually be transferred into the container C below the hopper.

The frame 103 is suspended from the structure 102 by means of the legs 108, which do not in any way encumber the space within the frame 103 intended to be occupied by the positioning element 27.

The said element includes a central hub 109 that carries a clamp 110 with a control unit 116. The hub 109 is sustained by a series of spokes 111 that connect it to an inner frame on which there is mounted at least one other clamp 112 with its own control unit 113. Preferably, however, there will be three such clamps, distributed in a substantially uniform manner along the circumference of the inner frame.

The frame 103 also carries ^{usually mounted on the said inner frame} one or more centering formations 114.

The said centering formations preferably include a fork element 114a, which, when the element 27 comes to be located (as will be described in greater detail later) at the level of the upper rim of the container C, will engage with an appropriate counterpart projecting from that rim and will thus avoid undesired relative rotations. Usually there will also be present a pin 114b, as well as a corresponding cavity 115 carried in a ^{generally} peripheral position by the inner frame of the frame 103.

The operating units 116 and 113 of the clamps 110 and 112 are in their turn controlled, just like the unit that controls the aperture of the outlet opening, 20a of the silo 20, by the unit 105, ^{The unit 105 also controls} ~~controlling~~ the feeding of the sand from the bottom opening 104 of the hopper 30, the load cells 106 and the control unit of the jack 101, by a processor-type control unit K, ^{The control unit K} ~~that~~ may consist, for example, of a so-called PLC (acronym of Programmable Logic Controller) or some equivalent processing unit that controls (in accordance with criteria that are in themselves known and/or will be rendered obvious by the present description) the operation of these organs in a manner that is fully coordinated with the

operation of the other parts of the plant, especially the robot R and the trolleys 50.

The operating unit 113 is preferably configured in such a manner that, with the system at rest, the return elements, springs for example, will keep the clamps 112 in their fully open position.

As can be more readily appreciated from the view reproduced in Figure 2, the element 27 is not fixed to the frame 103, but rather rests freely and, be it noted, in an exactly centred position on the said frame, and can therefore become disengaged from the frame 103 by performing an upward movement relative to it.

The operating cycle of the device constituting the substation 22 can be summarily described in the following terms.

The device gets ready to receive a container C (already containing the quantity of sand ^{it} received at the substation 21 on the upstream side) while the complex of parts sustained by the structure 102 is in the position shown by means of full lines in both Figure 2 and Figure 3. In other words, when the substation is ready to receive a new container, the fluid jack 101 keeps the entire structure at the upper end of its travel.

Let us suppose that when the container C arrives, as also in the phase that immediately precedes or follows its arrival, the robot R has already picked up a model S and inserted the grip formation T with which it is provided into the clamp 110. The clamp is first maintained in its open position, which enables it to receive the said grip formation T, and is then closed around it, so that it will come to carry the model S. After releasing the model S it has just loaded into

the device 22, the robot arm R returns towards the structure from which the models are picked up (which is typically of the turntable type and is not illustrated) in search of a new model S.

In the meantime, the outlet aperture 20a of the silo 20 has been opened, so that there has dropped into the hopper 30 a quantity of sand corresponding to the quantity it is subsequently desired to discharge into the container C.

At this point the jack 101 is operated in such a way as to cause the entire supporting structure 102 to become gradually lowered towards the container C. This operation ensures that the model S will be lowered into the container C.

In the course of this operation the model is lowered from the position shown in Figures 2 and 3 by means of full broken lines to the position indicated by means of the chain-dotted lines in the same figures.

In the lowered position previously referred to, the model S usually comes to rest on top of the sand F already contained in the container C as a result of the pre-filling operation previously carried out at the substation 21. In any case, the said downward movement causes the clamps 112 to engage the upper rim of the container C. Activation of the unit 113 (likewise controlled by the PLC K) ensures that the clamps 112, originally open, will now tighten and grip the rim of the container C: the series of spokes 111, and therefore also the hub 109 they carry in a central position, will thus come to constitute what is *de facto* a single piece with the container C. This applies also as regards the clamps 110 carried by the hub 109 and, consequently, the model S.

In the said lowered position, therefore, the operating unit

105 controlling the bottom outlet of the hopper 30 can be activated to open the said outlet, so that the quantity of sand contained in it will now be discharged into the container C and there cover the model S.

It will readily be appreciated that the said model is kept firmly in a fixed position with respect to the container C by means of the clamp 110 carried by the hub 109, which in its turn is linked by means of the spokes 111 to the clamps 112 that grip the rim of the container C.

The descending sand will not therefore be able to cause any undesired displacements of the model S while the container is being filled. *There is no undesired displacement* ~~This~~ even when the sand comes down in a rush of considerable intensity and/or when the model has surfaces orientated in such a manner as to exert a certain deflection action on the falling sand S ~~(so that the model, by reaction, becomes subject to a certain fluid dynamic thrust)~~.

Examination of Figure 2 also makes it clear that, since the clamps 112 grip the rim of the container C, the positioning element 27, taken as a whole, will no longer be able to follow the downward movement of the frame 103. The travel of the jack 101 is in fact regulated (in a manner coordinated with all the other dimensional magnitudes in play) in such a manner as to ensure that when the frame 103 reaches its lowermost position, it will be wholly disengaged from the positioning element 27 and, consequently, also from the model S.

In these conditions, the container C, complete with the model S and the further quantity of sand it received at the substation 22, can be subjected to the vibration operation, which is performed, in a known manner, with the help of the generator 32a while the formations 31a keep the container C

lifted off the trolley 50 used to transport it.

The said vibratory motion is applied to the body of the container while the model S is kept in a fixed position with respect to the container C by means of the various parts numbered 109 to 112. This ensures that the said vibratory motion, no matter how great its amplitude or intensity, will not be able either to displace the model S from its correct position or to cause a breakage of its gripping formation T, which in most cases will eventually define the channel through which the casting material will be poured into the container C.

On completion of the vibration operation, the lifting formations 31a will again lower the container C onto its trolley 50. At this point the jack 101 can be operated in the direction that will cause the structure 102 to become raised, while both the clamps 110 and the clamps 112 are opened, so that the positioning element 27 becomes disengaged from both the rim of the container C and from the grip formation T of the model S, which has to remain within the container C.

The frame 103 will therefore begin to rise and engage with the positioning element 27.

The presence of the centering formations 114a, 114b and their respective complementary formations ensures that the positioning element 27 will again become engaged with the frame 103 in an accurately defined position, so that the starting conditions indicated by means of the full lines in Figures 2 and 3 can eventually become exactly reconstituted.

When the structure 102 and the various elements it carries have eventually returned to their raised position, the container transport line can again be set in motion, so that the container C that has just been processed will be moved

forward to substation 23 of Figure 1, while a new container will be moved from substation 21 to the device that constitutes substation 22.

While this is happening, the robot R has the time it needs to insert a new model S into the clamp of the positioning element 27 and the bottom outlet 20a of the silo 20 can be opened again to reconstitute the sand supply needed in the hopper 30 for the next filling.

In addition to the previously described advantages in connection with the operations of filling the sand into the container C and vibrating it, the solution according to the invention therefore has the further advantage of permitting the operations of loading the models S and filling the hopper 30 to be carried out while the containers are being moved, thus avoiding possible idle times.

As already mentioned in the introductory part of the present description, the substation 22 that has just been described in detail usually forms part of a plant or system that, in addition to the said substation 22 and the container transport system 50, includes also other stations and substations for carrying out the following technological operations in due succession:

- sand filling and vibration (other substations 21, 23 and 24 as already described)
- casting (one station)
- extraction of castings and sand (one station).

The last two of these stations are of a known type and have known characteristics and have not therefore been illustrated on the attached drawings.

As already mentioned, at the entry side of the system the

clusters constituting the models S are loaded with the help of a buffer turntable that presents them to the robot R, which then picks them up from the turntable and automatically feeds them into the sub-station 22.

Given the different types of pieces (and therefore models and castings) that may have to be made, the following may vary:

- sand filling (speed at which the containers C are filled, level to which the containers are filled at the various sub-stations 21-24);
- vibration (vibration frequency and/or duration);
- casting (quantity of metal to be cast, casting modalities);
- extraction of the castings (angle of inclination of the container when it is tipped to permit the castings to be picked up, usually by means of an anthropomorphic robot).

These variables and the possible changes associated with them can therefore be configured as a typical recipe for each casting.

The solution according to the invention is such that these functions can be completely automated. To this end, matters can be arranged in such way that the robot R, immediately after picking up a model S from the turntable, presents it in front of an identification station consisting, for example, of a television camera P and an appropriate model recognition module of a known type and possibly resident in the control unit K. The identification station recognizes the model S (among a set of possible models) and thereupon informs the system of the particular recipe needed for this model. This can be done by means of an appropriate type identification signal generated, for example, in the control unit K.

Once it has been inserted in the container C at the sand-

filling station, the model S is - as it were - paired with the container (which is provided with a plate T, which could be - for example - of the magnetic or optical reading type, on which the casting data, recipe included, can be memorized). Prior to entry into each technological station, an electronic reader informs the station in question of the contents of the container, thus enabling it to fall into line with the parameters of a particular recipe.

Naturally, the realization details and the implementation forms can be widely varied with respect to what has hereby been described and illustrated without in any way altering the principle of the present invention or going beyond its scope as defined by the claims set out below.